

Cultural Studies--a preliminary institutional definition
(definition for a School of Speech Committee on Cultural Studies)

Chuck Kleinhans

In the broad sense, Cultural Studies is a multi-disciplinary field which uses a contemporary definition of culture drawing on the sociological-anthropological sense of culture as human social interaction and its material/technological objects and processes. It also draws on traditional humanities studies of culture in the sense of art. Thus we can recognize its presence and antecedents in social and cultural history, literature and visual arts, performing arts, cultural anthropology, qualitative and ethnographic sociology--what Europeans tend to call "the human sciences." It has also had a significant presence in journalism--both thoughtful reportage and critical reviewing and analysis in the public sphere.

Because it has most often been applied to modern and contemporary societies, Cultural Studies has been especially linked to the study of representation and the media, and as a cross-disciplinary mode of inquiry it has been useful to areas such as American Studies, Communication Studies, African-American Studies, Women's Studies, etc. Because it has been open to new and emerging developments and has attracted younger researchers, it has been especially useful to examining cultural aspects of new social-political subcultures and movements such as gay/lesbian/queer activism, youth cultures, racial-ethnic groups, etc. It has also been useful to journalism and business schools especially in areas of advertising and marketing.

In a narrow sense, Cultural Studies has often been construed as the history of a specific intellectual development stemming from one institution--the Birmingham Center. In this line of development, it coalesces out of the work of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson and is further developed at Birmingham by Stuart Hall and then by his students as they move to Australia, Canada, the U.S., and so on. In this more restricted sense, it has been embattled and often politicized in relation to different fields and disciplines. For example, in communications and media studies it is often rejected by (generally politically conservative to liberal) traditional quantitative/functionalism/administrative researchers as well as (politically liberal to radical) political economists. Similarly it is often stigmatized by traditionalist humanities scholars for crossing beyond the canon and formal procedures.

Cultural Studies has been institutionalized in peculiar ways--largely through loose affiliations of faculties than departments and programs, more through shared research areas than organized or interdependent research projects, more through individual than group work. Thus its presence has been most notable in some conferences, some periodicals (e.g. *Cultural Studies*, *Social Text*, etc.) and some university press series (Routledge, Duke, Minnesota, etc.) Almost all practitioners would admit to the existence of a certain amount of dubious work done in the area

(a characteristic of all emerging areas), but as research agendas develop and investigators are more seasoned, it is clear that to the extent that the immediate and sometimes ephemeral social processes and cultural objects examined in Cultural Studies are subjected to a broader contextual framework of historical, institutional, economic, and political analysis, Cultural Studies provides a powerful direction for analysis.